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AUTHOR Saville-Troike, Muriel
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ABSTRACT

Considerations in teaching students from linguistically diverse backgrounds are outlined. The instructional program must consider: (1) the social, economic, and political circumstances of the students' families; (2) their reasons for being in the United States and the length of their residence; (3) their attitudes toward the English-speaking group and English; (4) their attitudes toward their own language and cultural maintenance; (5) parental aspirations; and (6) the social, economic, and political considerations within the United States. In light of these points, the merits of four education models--the Monolingual Mother Tongue, Transitional Bilingual Education, Maintenance Bilingual Education, and Monolingual Second Language Education--are discussed. Any model chosen must: (1) utilize a variety of techniques and texts appropriate to the situations; (2) explore pre-existing parent, student, teacher, and community attitudes; (3) increase the cultural awareness of teachers; (4) provide teachers with curriculums from their students' home countries, (5) help teachers utilize community resources; and (6) train teachers to maintain classroom discipline appropriate for all age groups. (PMJ)

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SOCIOCULTURAL DIMENSIONS OF TESOL AND BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Muriel Saville-Troike
Georgetown University

I may surprise some of you with what I have to say today, particularly those of you who may know that most of my own work is in academic areas labeled "linguistics" and "language teaching," because the essential message I'd like to convey is that language per se may not be such an important factor in education after all.

ESL and Bilingual Education in the United States were founded--and funded--largely on the premise that linguistic differences as such, and particularly a lack of proficiency in English, are a primary causative factor in the low academic achievement of students in American schools who are from limited English-speaking backgrounds. This is certainly a plausible argument, especially in those cases where students with limited English-speaking ability have been required to learn exclusively through the medium of English. Certainly those students are at a disadvantage trying to understand instruction and express themselves in a foreign language, especially when they must compete with other students who have already mastered English. The Lau vs. Nichols decision is a clear indicator that such an argument is plausible even to the Supreme Court of our country.

Such an explanation is overly simplistic, however; we must look further than the linguistic differences to find a cause for low academic achievement among limited-English speakers. There is good reason to suspect that students' competence in English at the time they enroll in school does not correlate as highly with their ultimate academic success as do some other sociocultural factors, and that a foreign language of instruction is only one dimension of the cultural discontinuity between home and school which has traditionally raised such a barrier to learning for the students from linguistically diverse backgrounds who are now the primary target for our programs and our teaching efforts.

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I am not going to say that our job is not an important one. Far from it. What I am going to say is that teaching students from linguistically diverse backgrounds is a far more complex task than many realize, and certainly more complex than most of us have been prepared to deal with in the course of our professional training, or than what is provided for in most of the instructional material which we use. My intent is to call attention to some of this complexity, and then to outline briefly some of the ways in which I think we can respond to it in our programs and our practices.

The complexity begins with the diverse origins of the students we teach. Many who are "limited English speaking" are not only native Californians, but from families whose residence predates the Gold Rush. When my own family arrived in California via covered wagon back in the 1830's, they--as native English speakers--were clearly in a linguistic minority and needed to learn Spanish as a language of

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wider communication; both the English and Spanish--and the Russians, too, if we look further north in the state--were immigrants in a territory already occupied by people who spoke dozens of Native American languages. Still in the 19th century came waves of Chinese speakers, Armenians, and a multitude of other peoples. Despite all the potential analogies with gold processing, California never has been a melting pot. Although the languages and cultures of most native inhabitants didn't survive the conquest and settlement of us immigrants, the languages and cultures of many "Long-Time Californs" are still vital and viable, adding to the richness and diversity of our natural resources.

I taught kindergarten in Fresno County back in the days when it was illegal to use any language but English for classroom instruction, and I got into trouble with my school board for speaking some Spanish with the children of the migrant farm laborers--often third or fourth generation in the Valley. I redeemed myself by using German, too, which was the home language of most of my school board members, of the farm owners in that district, and thus totally acceptable. Experiences such as this lead me to believe that the years of English imperialism in this state was not due to any general belief that everyone should just speak English, but to quite selective discrimination against particular minority groups. I'm also quite sure the primary social and educational handicap faced by children from these groups was this general pattern of discrimination, and of negative attitudes and expectations, and not just language differences per se. The school where I taught twenty years ago refused even to buy enough books or desks to provide for children who would be moving with the crops--and not incidentally, whose parents weren't paying local property taxes. There has been some progress, although certainly not enough.

Linguistic and cultural diversity in California has, of course, been greatly increased by more recent immigrations. Among these groups, too, there are profound differences, and different factors will, in turn, profoundly influence education. First are differences in the circumstances, or motivation for immigration. There are groups desiring to assimilate to the dominant society. But there are also groups escaping persecution for their religious or cultural identity--because they would not give it up--who are seeking freedom for the expression of cultural differences. These immigrants usually have a strong desire to maintain language and cultural identity in their new country. Some immigrants are political refugees, and have left their native countries for survival. Some consider themselves temporary residents, and hope to return to their homeland. These include the Cubans waiting hopefully in Florida and Washington, D.C. for the end of Castro's rule, some Filipinos in California still waiting for the end of Marcos, and many of the Chinese speakers on both sides of the United States. Others are more resigned to residency here, such as most recent arrivals from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, but their immigration was still not by choice. And there are groups who immigrate seeking a higher standard of living: better jobs, better education for their children. Some consider themselves permanent residents, and many of these will want to assimilate. Many still have very deep roots in another homeland, and hope to return as soon as "conditions" improve.

There are also great cultural differences in groups coming from European vs. non-European backgrounds, and differences depending on social class and education. The visibility of the immigrant group is also a major factor, with immigrants of different races facing quite different attitudes and circumstances, and quite different possibilities regarding assimilation.

Finally, in the present generation of immigrants, the age of arrival influ-

ences educational procedures: children who will have all of their formal education here vs. older students who are making a change of countries somewhere during their education vs. adults, who themselves range from professional training in the country of origin to those lacking even a basic education. Some of the factors will be similar across all ages, but many will be very, very different.

I think we need to begin with this reminder of at least the gross differences in the groups we teach, to say nothing at all on this occasion of the extreme intragroup (including the individual) variability, lest we delude ourselves into thinking there is a best model or method for teaching "immigrant" students, "minority group" students, "LESA's" (limited English speaking ability), or "LEP's" (the more recent acronym meaning limited English proficiency).

I see my task here not to give any definitive answers on the education of these students, but to convince you that there are no definitive answers, and to suggest ways in which we can respond differentially to the variability we encounter.

When deciding on appropriate instructional models, when preparing curriculum and training teachers, and in actual classroom techniques and procedures, we must be aware of and responsive to such factors as the following:

1. The social, economic and political circumstances of the students' families.

2. Their reasons for being here, and the length of their residence.

3. Their attitudes toward the dominant English-speaking group and its language.

4. Their attitudes toward their own language and cultural maintenance, and toward its augmentation or replacement by the language and culture of the dominant society.

5. The families' long-range plans and aspirations for their children, socially and politically as well as academically.

Furthermore, it is not enough for such awareness and responsiveness to occur at the generalized level of our consciousness, although this is essentially the "cultural sensitivity" we consider so important. These factors should control which educational model is decided on in a particular context, which curricular materials are used, and which teaching methods are practiced.

The factors I have just listed are only part of the whole, however. We must also consider the social, economic and political circumstances of our country, state, and the local community; we must consider the dominant group's attitude toward the language and culture of each minority group and the degree to which it will express acceptance or discrimination; we must consider academic achievement expectations or norms, occupational demands, and so on. This list is by no means meant to be exhaustive.

I'm not sure how you feel about all the complexities I'm introducing, but sometimes as I face them, I think back nostalgically to my early stages of TESL training, when once I had learned how to contrast the students' native language with English and had mastered basic drill techniques, it was assumed I could teach effectively. But then I remember that many of the children I taught English as a

second language at the kindergarten level were retained in first grade because my teaching did not enable them to learn to read English well enough to "pass" the following year, that most of them (like their brothers and sisters before them) dropped out by high school, and that relatively few have yet escaped the poverty and social separateness into which they were born. I had to conclude that the kind of teaching I had been prepared to do, both in my general teacher training, was grossly inadequate to meet the educational needs of my limited English-speaking students.

I might attempt to explain the increased complexity of the TESL field we are part of today by drawing an analogy with biological evolution: evolutionary development always involves increased complexity, leading to the claim that TESL is now a higher life form than it once was. However, I might do better to relate the increased complexity of our considerations in applied linguistics to very basic changes which have been occurring recently in the field of linguistics itself: with a changing view of the nature of language to include far more than phonology, lexicon, and grammar, and with an increasing scope of social concepts and behaviors coming within the province of linguistic description and analysis. Applied linguists, like descriptive linguists, must now consider not only the code (or language forms) used for communication, but their functions and sociocultural contexts as well. When we are concerned with the education of bilingual students, we must deal with two or more communicative codes, greater variation in perceived or intended functions in language use, and increased scope and complexity in the sociocultural contexts which must be considered.

As I said earlier, I see a need for us to apply understanding of these diverse factors to all levels of our profession, ranging from official choice of an educational model, to curriculum development and teacher training, to classroom techniques and procedures.

The choice of an educational model is the least complex of these tasks because the alternatives are very limited. There are probably only four basic choices:

1. Monolingual Mother Tongue education.
2. Transitional Bilingual Education: Mother Tongue to Second Language.
3. Maintenance Bilingual Education: Mother Tongue plus Second Language.
4. Monolingual Second Language education ("submersion").

Even here, it is easy to show that no choice could be based on linguistic or pedagogical factors alone.

In terms of cognitive development, the Monolingual Mother Tongue model might well be best. In California and in Texas, we often find that completely non-English speaking students who immigrate from a Spanish-only education program in Mexico are far ahead of the bilingual students, especially in the areas of mathematics and science. Even in such language dependent areas as reading English, however, within a year or two these immigrant children surpass the performance of students who have been learning to read English since their first year of school. Strong evidence to support this point is coming from research on Finnish children who immigrate to Sweden (see Kutnabb-Kangas and Troike).

Even if Monolingual Mother Tongue education were proved to be best for cognitive development, however, it could not be tolerated in public schools in the United States for political and social reasons. First, it would effectively segregate minority group children on the basis of ethnicity, both from the domi-

nant group and from other minority groups, which would be counter to rulings of our Supreme Court. In other words, if given a choice between a system that would better promote individuals' cognitive development and one which would better promote social integration, most residents of the United States and our legislative and judicial institutions would probably consider social integration much more important. Parents' attitudes would vary depending on their desire to assimilate vs. their intent to return to their country of origin, or at least maintain separateness. Non-English Mother Tongue education in the United States is available in private schools and to an elite population, but is almost entirely limited to families who consider themselves temporary residents in the United States, such as embassy staffs in the Washington, D.C. area and in a few other metropolitan centers. On the other side of this question, Monolingual Mother Tongue education could be used by a dominant society that wished to keep a minority group separate in order to encourage their return to the country of origin, and does indeed serve such a purpose for children of guest workers in several European countries. My point here is that opting for or against Monolingual Mother Tongue education is not based on pedagogical or linguistic factors, but on politics, economics, and social attitudes.

When we consider the relative value of either transitional or maintenance bilingual education, none of us are totally objective, even if we put scholarly headings on our papers about the subject or make reference to "data" from umpteen research projects. The present demand for more "evidence" on the effect of bilingual education is a demand for evidence to support decisions which have already been made for other reasons. While one might value more objectivity with regard to educational models, it would be naive and impractical to think that questions of relative academic achievement alone could--or should--ever control language and educational policy.

Parents and educators with very different goals for the education of minority group students may support bilingual education: some support bilingual education believing it provides a more efficient way for students to master the dominant language and gain access to the dominant culture--to assimilate ultimately; some support it as a boundary-maintaining mechanism that allows students to retain their linguistic and cultural "roots," their ethnic integrity and identity--to resist assimilation; some believe in bilingual education as an instrument for the maintenance of diverse cultural traditions; some believe in bilingual education primarily as an instrument for social, and cultural, change; some believe in bilingual education as a civil right, a requirement for equal educational opportunity.

The reasons many people are strongly opposed to bilingual education, and may feel profoundly threatened by it, are also manifestations of deeply embedded beliefs and values. Oddly, often these reasons are the same as those of the proponents. The same beliefs in equality of educational and economic opportunity, for instance, lead some to oppose bilingual education for fear students in such programs will not learn as much English and will, therefore, not have equal opportunity in an English-dominant society. We tend to be more emotional than objective about arguments such as these because they are not mere assertions which evidence might clearly prove to be true or false, but rather manifestations of beliefs and values which we accept or reject at a much deeper level. Even financial arguments, whether too little or too much is being spent on bilingual education, are disagreements on budget priorities, and are thus manifestations of relative community, state, and national values.

I often argue against the fourth alternative model, submersion in English

only, mainly because that's essentially what we did to students for so many years, resulting in dropout and failure for far too many, but someone always responds, "Well, what about this situation?", or "What about such and such a case?", and even here I must say, "It all depends." It depends on the relative prestige of the Mother Tongue and the second language, and on the social class the student is coming from, for instance. If the Mother Tongue is a prestigious language, and if the student is quite secure in his place in the world, submersion in a second language seems to be all right. It depends on the concentration by language group in a school or a class. If there is one limited English speaker dumped in a class of native English-speaking students, especially if he comes from that middle class background or better, and he is young, while the experience is a traumatic one, he generally adjusts both linguistically and educationally in a surprisingly brief time, even without any auxiliary English instruction.

And then there are the port-of-entry situations. One of our TESOL members, Betty Mace-Matluck, a few years back made a linguistic survey just of kindergarten students in Seattle, Washington, where she identified approximately 350 children who were native speakers of a language other than English. These were native speakers of 39 different languages, including Icelandic, Serbo-Croatian, Hindi, Turkish, Samoan, and five American Indian languages. In San Francisco, students natively speak over 70 languages, including French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, Tagalog, Ilocano, Korean, Arabic, Greek, and Samoan. And in Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, where we also have great diversity in both our immigrant and our temporary foreign resident populations, one teacher may have speakers of fifteen different languages in a single class, together with perhaps another ten to fifteen who speak English natively.

In such contexts, Mother Tongue support instruction is still possible and desirable using individualized instructional techniques and materials, but English must usually become the lingua franca for communication among the students as well as the primary medium for teacher-student interaction. Thus, even such mundane and practical considerations as availability of materials and the "mere mortal" nature and capabilities of teachers must ultimately be taken into account.

Since I trust I have made my general point by now regarding the complexity of the factors which influence the education of minority students, let me very briefly outline some of the ways in which I think we can respond to such diversity of needs, attitudes, circumstances, and resources in our programs and practices.

1. By resisting, individually and collectively, commitment to one educational model, one set of textbooks, one method of teaching, or one anything as <u>the best</u> for all situations and all students. We need to have choices and we need to offer them.

2. We recognize the importance to teaching and learning of different beliefs, values, and attitudes, and of different background experiences, but we need to find out much more about what these differences are.

   Current educational research, particularly in bilingual education, is indeed attempting to measure attitudinal factors as outcome or dependent variables, but there is little exploration of pre-existing student, parent, teacher, and community attitudes as input or independent variables to educational programs.

Although, except for young children, immigrant students have usually had formal educational experiences in another country, we seldom know what they have studied, or how they have learned to learn before entering our own program. There is no way we can really "take the student where he is" or "build in a positive way on prior experiences," as we say we should, if we don't have this kind of information. Too often we assume that there is some universal scope and sequence to curriculum, and, therefore, that a twelve year old, say, from any country, will have been presented with the same concepts. I'm sure we really know this isn't true, but we generally operate on that assumption in any case. The results range from needless repetition to serious gaps in learning.

Curriculum centers, especially in ports of entry, should have instructional materials from countries of student origin. In addition to providing information on what concepts have been presented, teachers can use books from these centers in individualizing instruction for speakers of different languages so that the content being taught in English will be more meaningful, and use them to help students at least retain skills, such as reading, that they have already acquired in their first language.

I would also suggest that comparative curriculum is a badly needed educational specialization in areas with large immigrant populations, at either the master's or doctoral level of preparation. Specialists are needed to consult through such curriculum centers, and to teach relevant courses and workshops to others.

3. Given the range of sociocultural diversity we should expect, research by a few to document the differences can be only a small part of the answer. Staff training, both pre-service and in-service, should include heightening each educator's awareness, sensitivity, and knowledge about culture, and about its influence on oneself and others. I am not suggesting cultural sensitivity training in the sense of T-grouping and saying, "I'm OK, you're OK," but learning to observe cultural patterns and to respond appropriately; it does not just deal with attitudes, but involves observational training and changes in unconscious micro-behaviors. I think one of the courses we are now offering at Georgetown University is particularly relevant to this need and I would recommend it to others. It is called the Ethnography of Communication, and teaches methods for observing and describing communication events in different cultures, and for describing classroom interaction. Ideally, there should also be field-based training, including observation, community visitation, collecting and interpreting data which will be relevant not only in the development of awareness and sensitivity, but also will be applicable to relevant curriculum development and appropriate classroom practices. I would like to give you

three brief examples of such applicability.

For a teacher to respond positively and appropriately to diversity at the classroom practices level, there must first be recognition of the range of diversity in a class, and then an understanding of which differences are individual in nature and which differences are represented because of differences in group membership among the students. As we all know, for instance, there are some students who raise their hands to ask questions or volunteer information and some who don't. The teacher must first recognize the differential in this behavior, and then understand which behaviors in the class may be attributed to individual personality traits and which to the differential values and rules of appropriateness which different cultures or different social groups place on self-assertiveness.

To insure appropriate cultural content for teaching a diverse student population, teachers must develop skills in using community resources, and in teaching students to collect and report information from their own environments in a positive way. Cultural content for teacher training should also include developing sensitivity to what should not be discussed in school, what questions should not be asked, and what student behaviors should not be required. Taboos and restrictions are also culture specific, as is what is considered sacred and what profane. Developing and applying such awareness is essential if the culture of the home is to really be respected by the school. Even unintentional or well-meaning violations can result at best in student embarrassment or confusion, and at worst in causing the student to reject the traditions of his home.

I would also like to address responding to diversity in one other area of classroom practices, and that is "classroom management," or discipline. When cultural differences in control and motivation are not understood, learning may be seriously inhibited. Immigrant students accustomed to rigid class discipline, for instance, often react to a relaxed teaching style as an undisciplined situation and respond by talking excessively or with other "misbehavior," creating a stereotype response from their teachers that they are "undisciplined." (This is even reported by college-level instructors.) The use of competition to enhance motivation does not work with many groups, especially when students from one group are asked to compete among themselves for an outsider (the teacher). The choice of a language for controls and directions is also important in a bilingual context, with English perceived by students from some cultures as milder than their home language and from some cultures as stronger; at the same time, students from some backgrounds interpret the normal classroom projection level of English as a signal of anger, even when none is intended.

Training programs should teach, or teach teachers how to find out, how the behavior of children in different groups is traditionally controlled, to what extent, and in what domains.

Observational skills should be added for finding out what students' reactions to various kinds of management techniques are, but that in itself is not sufficient. We need to know why. (For further discussion of this topic, see Saville-Troike.)

4. Finally, I would like to suggest how second language methodology might respond to the diversity in our student population.

   Teachers need to have at their command a whole grab-bag of techniques as well as skills in switching techniques even within a single lesson in order to provide for different student backgrounds and different styles of learning. Such skills can be developed in pre-service or in-service teachers by teaching them how to adapt any lesson in an existing text or guide to provide for a range of student competence and behavior, and by teaching them techniques for individualizing instruction.

   A critical element in such "eclectic" teaching is knowing which techniques and activities are successful with which students--and which are not. Existing language tests can provide very useful information on the overall success of a program, but not on the relative effectiveness of differential strategies with different students. Continuous monitoring skills must be developed, and again I feel the descriptive and analytical model we are calling the Ethnography of Communication is eminently applicable. Dell Hymes of the University of Pennsylvania coined that term, and he would include the type of evaluation I am suggesting in what he calls "Ethnographic Monitoring."

Even after saying the kinds of things I have said here about the need to individualize instruction, to provide for diversity, I am sometimes asked, "What TESL textbook series should we use that will do this?" The point is, of course, that, while textbooks have relative value as a point of departure in our teaching, by their very codified nature they cannot provide for the diversity which we must.

If it sounds like I'm putting a very great burden on the teachers of students from different language backgrounds and on those who train the teachers, you are quite right, and we are back where I began my presentation. Teaching in this context is the most complex teaching task I can imagine because of the linguistic, social, and cultural diversity involved. When we add the professional and moral commitment which we have when we teach the displaced and depressed, those who have traditionally been discriminated against by the more dominant groups in our society, or the optimistic who have more recently chosen our country for a better life, I'm sure you'll agree with me that all the effort required of us is very much worthwhile.

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